THE MASTER AS A SOCIAL ENGINEER

The Worshipful Master of Blue Mound, Illinois, read a letter to his members which startled them very wide awake, as one may guess from this typical paragraph:

> "Out of these 134 members I have checked the names of ninety-six who live within easy distance of the lodge. NOW MARK THIS STATEMENT! Out of those ninety-six I count nine men who have done ALL (note the capitals) ALL the degree work this year and I am counting myself as one of the nine. Do you not believe me when I say there is something wrong! What is it that is wrong? - that is what I have been asking myself all this year. Is it the Master? It might be the case this year but the Master was not the reason during the few years past and these conditions existed then.... The degree nights show an average of fourteen. Then out of the fourteen count out the nine who do the work. What does that leave ? How many of you members attended lodge just once during the past year?"

It would be impossible to put the problem confronted by the Master of the average small lodge more forcefully or more simply. It is almost entirely a question of keeping his membership in action.

When a Master finds his lodge lagging behind, it is a good thing for him to remind himself that human nature is as much subject to the laws of cause and effect as anything else, and that men and women, for all the capriciousness of their behavior, can be depended upon to react in a certain way under certain conditions. For this reason is it true that the management of a lodge may be considered as a piece of mechanics, and the Master as a social engineer. If he rightly understands the materials and forces with which he deals, and understands how to bring the right kind of pressure to- bear on that material, he will always gain a certain response and result. The thing will work with the inevitability of a natural law.

The science of social mechanics is as yet in its infancy, but it is one of which we already can know something, and it may be that a few suggestions of that order will not be altogether thrown away. Let it be supposed that a Master takes charge of a lodge in a city of 5,000 inhabitants, and that he is desirous of succeeding: the question arises, What can he do to succeed?

He can begin by ascertaining the just standard of success. What sized lodge should he have in a city of 5,000? Let him learn the total membership of his State, and let him divide that by the number of lodges to get the average size. In all probability he will discover that there is one Mason in every fifty of the total population, which would indicate a lodge of one hundred members for a city of 5,000. If a country population of 3,000 lies contributory to his lodge's territory he can add sixty to get the ideal size.

Then, if he wishes to discover if he is getting out a normal number of visitors and workers let him learn what is the average in his State. It will very probably run around ten per cent. Therefore if out of a membership of 160 all his meetings average sixteen in attendance he can feel that he is up to standard.

Next, he can learn from his Grand Secretary what is the total income of all the lodges in his State. Dividing this by the Masonic membership he can ascertain the per capita contribution of every Mason. This will very probably average about ten dollars, so that if his lodge has an income of $1600 per year

it is doing what may reasonably be asked of it. The overhead cost of maintaining a lodge, the average of charity expenditures, etc., etc., all these figures may be discovered in the same way.

A master should make these investigations in order to know where he stands and what he should rightfully ask of himself for it is as unwise to ask too much as too little.

When it comes to the amount of work that he can justly require of his brethren it is not so easy to be guided by the law of averages, for conditions differ too much among various communities. But even so there is no need to trust to chance in this, and an intelligent Master can rather easily make out a form chart for his lodge.

He can go over his membership roll member by member and ascertain the number still in good standing but no longer residents: adding to these the infirm, the old, and those so situated otherwise as to make participation impossible, he can subtract this number from his total membership and thereby learn what is the amount of live material available.

Then he can take a good street map of his community and by a system of pins can form a graphic chart of the accessibility of his membership to the lodge room, and thereby learn who could come, other things being equal, if they had the incentive.

Next, he can analyze individual by individual the corps of potentially active men and, by conference with a group of brothers, preferably his wardens and deacons, can classify this list according to the character of the men so as to learn how many he can depend on for ritualistic work, how many for social activities, how many for sick visiting, etc., etc. Having made this classification he can next write letters to each individual thus classified and place upon his shoulders responsibility for doing some appropriate task.

All this done the Master can next make a thoughtful analysis of the general conditions in his town in order to discover what form of service his lodge can most successfully and fruitfully engage in. The town may have an unemployment problem; the lodge can undertake that: or it may have a poverty problem; or, if it should chance to be a health resort community, it may have an illness problem; or it may lack music; or its politics may be of the dirty variety; or it may lack a chamber of commerce, or what not: each and every one of these conditions constitutes an opportunity for a lodge imbued with the Masonic spirit, and it is at one of these points that a Master should attack.

Men are very much averse to wearisome repetition, to idly sitting about doing nothing: they take pleasure in activity, they like to see difficult things attempted, and they enjoy the zest of a conflict. It is not to be expected - for it is not in keeping with human nature - that grown men will attend a lodge night after night that does nothing but grind at the degree mill. Moreover, such a lodge becomes selfish, inbred, and seclusive, and that is the flattest contradiction to the spirit of Masonry, and every real man in the membership will have the half-repressed feeling that his lodge (as a lodge) is a hypocrite, professing as it does an ideal of unselfish service but DOING nothing for the community which it professes to serve.

All this is to say that the majority of Masters fail (our energetic brother at Blue Mound is nowise included in this for he belongs to the successful side of the ledger) because they undertake their tasks blindly, vaguely, and without due and proper investigation of the conditions. A business man knows

that a business cannot successfully be carried on "sight unseen": a lodge is equally subject to the ordinary laws of human society, and will fail as surely as any business despite its high ideals, if it is not goverened by the same common-sense, scientific manner. The wise Master will study social mechanics, and train himself to be a good social engineer.

The Builder Magazine

January 1922 - Volume VIII - Number 1